

29th District Report

Transportation

The lack of a transportation package was either a major failure or “dodging a bullet” – depending on your point of view. The vast majority of constituent calls and letters I received opposed a gas tax increase. But that’s not the only reason I refused to support it.

The fact is, there was never a “transportation package.” There was only a “tax-increase package” – with no agreement on how the money would be spent! I want to know what the state is going to do with our tax dollars before I vote to provide the money. But apparently that’s not the way they’re accustomed to doing things in Olympia. We have to change that.



Several key projects on 38th St., 56th St. and other problem areas will move forward with current funds, but that’s not to say there isn’t a problem. Gridlock is stealing time from families and money from businesses. We need solutions, including finishing the Cross-base Highway to fix the mess on Pacific Avenue, modernizing gridlock-causing interchanges, and solving the Narrows Bridge nightmare.

It all costs money. If a transportation package lays out exactly what people will get for their money – and proves there’s no other way to get the job done – then maybe I could support it. But it’s not enough to say “we have problems, so let’s raise taxes.” That’s the wrong way to do things, and people are sick of it.

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**29th
District
Report**

**The 2001
sessions**



29th District Report:

The 2001 sessions

Representative Steve Kirby

There’s Got To Be A Better Way

Now that I’m a veteran legislator with FOUR sessions under my belt, I feel I’m now adequately qualified to sum up this process: There’s GOT to be a better way!

The partisan politics overwhelms good public policy. The rules of procedure give way too much power to a few individuals, disenfranchising the vast majority of citizens. And hypocrisy is taken to new heights. On many issues, the process resembles a high stakes political sporting event that is useless to the public, and results in unnecessary political gridlock.

This won’t be easy to change because the current power-holders will be less than enthusiastic about any movement to redistribute their influence. But I’ll continue to be vigilant in chipping away at this problem.

Thanks for the huge response to my “There ought to be a law” newsletter. I heard good ideas on issues ranging from junk cars to invasions of privacy by telemarketers – and good ideas for getting rid of existing laws that are useless or too intrusive. Next session, I’ll propose legislation based on ideas suggested by local citizens.

Be sure to let me know if you have other suggestions or gripes about government. I may not always agree, but I’ll always take your point of view to heart.

Sincerely,

Steve

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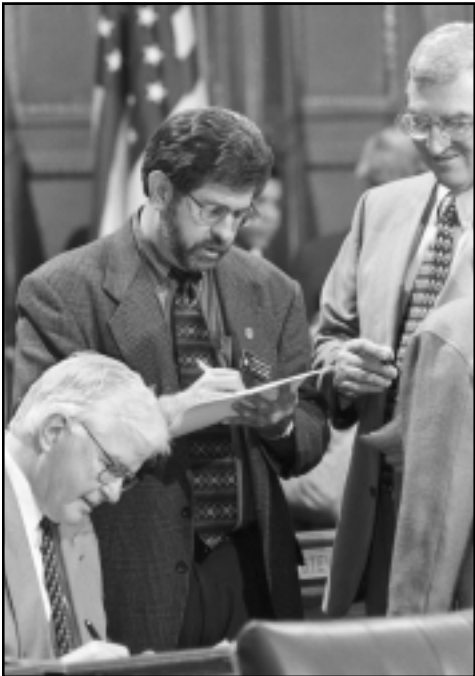


Was It Worth It?

In spite of all the tribulations, and contrary to what the media would have you believe, we did work hard and passed some very important legislation that will benefit the public for generations to come. We passed over 400 measures to:

- ▶ Improve elderly care,
- ▶ Zero in and crack down on meth labs,
- ▶ Strengthen worker and consumer protections,
- ▶ Increase pipeline safety,
- ▶ Inform parents of pesticide use in schools and day care,
- ▶ Reform state water-supply laws,
- ▶ Improve reimbursement for nursing homes,
- ▶ Help retain experienced teachers and other highly skilled employees,
- ▶ Create a new technology institute at UW Tacoma,
- ▶ Greatly improve the foster care system,
- ▶ Notify the public of unsafe or recalled infant products,
- ▶ Streamline local land use permits,
- ▶ Enhance fish & wildlife rules,
- ▶ Require better campaign finance disclosure,
- ▶ Mandate government efficiencies,
- ▶ Launch a new Veterans' Affairs Committee,
- ▶ Strengthen the Open Public Meetings Act,
- ▶ Boost energy supplies and conservation,
- ▶ Establish a tribal cigarette tax compact.

Clearly, the Legislature can work when we put partisan games aside and focus on the public's real interests. If we could just apply this lesson across the board...



The Budget

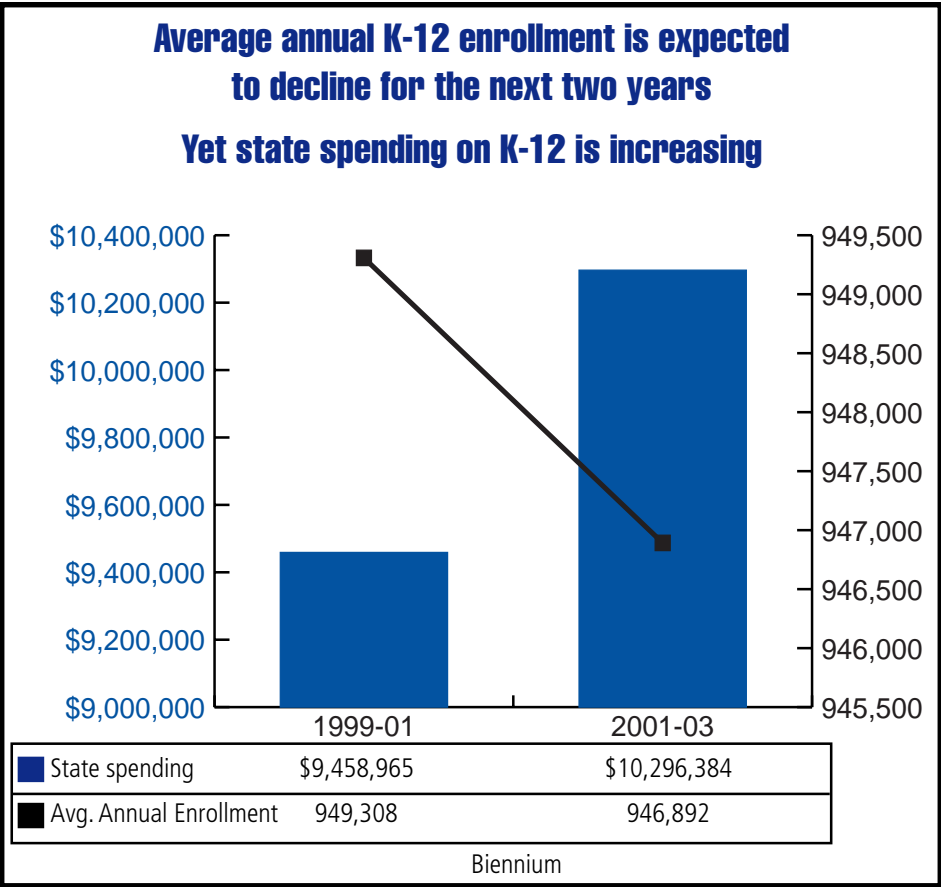
We passed a budget to keep the state operating for another two years. That's the good news.

The bad news is that we had to severely cut some state services and dip into the state surplus to balance the budget. And then we had to fight off dozens of House Republican amendments that would have increased state spending by almost a billion dollars if they had passed, which would have thrown the budget completely out of balance. I don't know what they were thinking.

The simple fact is that our expenses exceed our revenues. That's really going to catch up to us two years from now.

I'll be soliciting input from my constituents in a future communication regarding spending priorities, because I truly believe that we can't continue all the state programs we currently fund.

Education is the big bright spot in the new budget. We carried out last fall's public mandates for funding better schools (Initiatives 728 and 732) without raising taxes. The added money for teacher salaries, smaller class sizes, and efforts to meet higher academic standards will really help Pierce County schools. The chart lays out the increased state funding.



Primary Elections

I support our existing open primary system. For over 60 years, people in Washington have been able to vote in primary elections for the candidates of their choice, regardless of party. People want this freedom, but now our system is under attack.

When California's similar – but not identical – primary process was ruled unconstitutional, party bosses filed lawsuits to abolish our system. They want to force people to register by party, and prohibit Democrats from voting for Republicans and vice versa in primary elections. I hate that idea.

We should fight all the way to the Supreme Court to keep our open primaries. If we lose, we should consider a system that puts the top two vote-getters in a primary election – regardless of party – on the general election ballot. But I will never support a system that lets party bosses decide whose votes will be counted in public elections.

Looking Ahead

As I said earlier, I want you to contact me with your ideas about legislation. Some of the priorities I'm already working on for next year include:

- ▶ **Prescription drug costs.** Soaring prescription drug prices are gouging families, especially seniors, who typically fill 18 prescriptions each year. We've got to find a way to help. A discount pricing system or state-assisted bulk purchasing are possibilities.
- ▶ **Fair share.** Too many state criminal justice facilities are being dumped in Pierce County. I'll be working with both Democrats and Republicans to build a bipartisan Pierce County coalition to demand more fairness in state siting decisions.
- ▶ **Privacy.** Citizens told me they want stronger laws to protect their privacy from telemarketers and others who sell personal information without permission. I'm exploring ways to protect privacy that won't have unintended consequences for legitimate business needs, such as credit checks for loan applicants.

